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THE OLD YEAR
AND THE NEW
CHARLES E. JEFFERSON





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The Old Year
And the New

BY

CHARLES EDWARD JEFFERSON
PASTOR OF BROADWAY TABERNACLE
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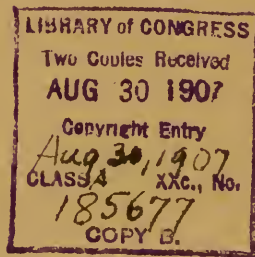
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The Old Year

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The Art of Forgetting

The Art of Forgetting

“One thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal.” PHIL. III. 13.

THIS sentence is a golden clasp by means of which two years may be held together.

The world is always interested in the lives of its successful men. In every land and time the man who has made for himself a place and a name has been an interesting, almost a fascinating, spectacle. How did he do it? That is the question which starts up in a thousand hearts. How did he climb to his position? How did he win the victory? How did he make his fortune and his name? How did he build the character that attracts and inspires? It is interesting to see how the young men of each new generation come flocking around the men of the preceding generation who have

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risen in the world, looking on them with curiosity and admiration, trying to grasp the secret of their success.

Every now and then some new book appears, giving the biographies of famous men or setting forth the maxims which were the governing principles of their lives. Almost every year some magazine brings out a symposium, in which a number of the leaders of our day tell the world what have been the influences which have gone to make them, and what have been the ruling ideas which have directed and shaped their lives. The world never grows weary of this sort of literature. We want to know everything possible about a man who has achieved success. Where was he educated? What books did he read? How did he work, and how did he play? We are curious to know even what he ate, thinking that possibly if

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we could eat some of the same material, we might reach an equal stature and develop a similar gift of power. There is no more interesting object on the earth than a genuinely successful man. There never has been a Samuel Johnson who has not had some Boswell tagging at his heels. There has never been a Goethe without some Eckermann drinking in his golden sentences and writing them down for the inspiration of succeeding generations.

Now Paul is one of the confessedly successful men of history. If you should make out a list of twelve of the men of the last two thousand years who have indisputably succeeded, it would be necessary to put his name in the list. There were all sorts of successful men in the first century,—merchants, rich men, generals, scholars, writers, politicians, statesmen, men whose names sparkled and

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fascinated the eyes of their contemporaries. But alas! how those glittering reputations have faded in the light of the suns of two thousand years, while the name of Paul shines brighter and brighter, like a fixed star in the firmament of the world. What was the secret of Paul's success? Will he tell us? Yes, he will. He is writing to his favorite church, the church that has gotten the deepest into his heart. To this church he will become more than usually communicative. In a burst of confidence he will tell it just how he has succeeded in becoming what he is.

This is what he says: "I keep right on forgetting, and I keep right on reaching. Those two words, 'forgetting' and 'reaching,' sum up the principles by which I live. I let the past go, and I keep reaching for the future; and, brethren, I ask you to follow my example."

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Let us think a little about the art of forgetting. Probably some one will say, "I would rather hear something about the art of remembering." Everybody nowadays is complaining about the difficulty of remembering. One not infrequently hears some despondent soul exclaim, "I can't remember anything at all." We hear so much and see so much and read so much that it makes no impression on the mind, and in a few short days all of it has vanished.

And so our generation is looking after men who can teach it the art of remembering. Every time a teacher rises, saying, "I know the secret of memory, and I can tell you how to hold on to things forever," great crowds go trooping out to meet that man, eager to become possessors of his secret.

The Christian pulpit has been emphasizing the duty of remembering. Most

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men are very heedless, very fickle, very careless and very forgetful, and the prophet of the Lord in every age has urged upon his hearers the duty of remembering. Turn through the pages of your Bible and see how again and again the emphasis has been laid upon that one great word, "*Remember.*" All the way from Moses down to the latest of the apostles we hear men saying, "O people, do not forget!" But that is only half of the message. Side by side with the exhortation to remember runs the exhortation to forget. Listen to the greatest of the prophets, Isaiah, in the forty-third chapter of the book which bears his name, urging upon his countrymen not to remember the former times, and to dismiss from their minds the things that have been. Listen to the language of Ezekiel, as with burning passion he pleads with his countrymen

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to remember Egypt no more. The fact is, both of these duties are of cardinal importance. There are some things to be remembered and some things to be forgotten, and it is the things which are to be forgotten about which men and women ought to think in the last days of a year which has grown old.

The strength of man is limited. To each one of us God entrusts only a small amount of energy, and in order to succeed it is necessary that we should use our possessions wisely. No man who wishes to achieve success can afford to do useless and weakening things. One of the most useless of all habits is that of dragging along too much of one's past. It handicaps a man in the race; it takes from him his strength. Many a man has been fatally crippled and paralyzed simply by his propensity to carry along things with him which he ought

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to have let go. The one sentence above all the other sentences of the Scriptures which would have done him most good is this sentence from the pen of St. Paul: "Forgetting the things which are behind." What are some of these things?

Blunders. We have all committed them. We have committed a lot of them. We have committed them from the beginning, and shall no doubt commit them to the end. As we look back across the years we can see that not one year has been free from mistakes. We made them when we were little children. On looking backward we can see them standing there looking at us, saying to us, "Yes, we belong to you." We committed them when we were young men and women, which was not surprising; and we committed them when we were fully grown, which is

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somewhat more surprising. We have never been able to travel through a single year without taking steps which were false. On looking backward the temptation is very strong to say, "Oh, if I had taken the left road instead of the right, or if I had put my money here and not put it there, or if I had gotten an education, or a different kind of education, if I had done the thing which I finally did five years sooner, or if I had read the books at twenty which I read at forty, or if I had done some other thing than the thing which I did, how different my life would have been!" Nothing is easier than to carry along with one the blunders of the past. And yet how foolish it is! Blunders are not such terrible things as we sometimes imagine. We have a right to commit them. God expects us to commit them. It is impossible not to

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commit them, because we are creatures of limited insight and meagre knowledge, and the air is full of dust, and we walk all the time in a mist, and it is impossible that we should always choose the right road and always do the best possible thing. And so the greatest men as well as the weakest men have made their mistakes and have been guilty of terrible errors. The early settlers of New England were wise men, but, oh, the mistakes which they made! The Continental Congress had in it as wise men as any congress ever had, but those men blundered right along all through the Revolutionary period. Our Civil War brought to the front the very sanest and greatest men of the nation, but from the beginning of the war to the end there was one long sickening record of blunders.

It is surely impossible for a man to do

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anything in this world, or to be anything, without running the risk of making mistakes. Better a thousand times push forward and attempt what is difficult and new and make a mistake at every step than never to do anything at all simply out of a craven fear that you may commit a blunder. Let us then forget our mistakes and remember them no more forever. Let us look upon them rather as blessings through which God has taught us how to live and work. Let us stand on top of them and reach out for higher things. How often you have heard people saying: "What a fool I was! What a *fool* I was! What a fool I *was!*" The next time you catch yourself saying that, change the tense of your verb. Do not say, "What a fool I *was!*" but say this: "What a fool I *am* to keep everlastingly saying, 'What a fool I *was!*'" A man never displays

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his folly more conspicuously than when he is using up his strength and time in crying over milk that has been spilt.

Let us forget also our losses. There are many kinds of them, only one of which can be here referred to, the loss of money. It will be well to select this one because it is the most common, and in some respects the most exasperating and distressing. There are very few experiences in life which have a more depressing influence upon the human mind than the loss of money, and the depression is all the greater when the sum of money lost is large, and it is greater still if the man who loses the money is past middle life. A man can endure with equanimity things at forty which prostrate him utterly at sixty. But this distressing experience is one of the most common of all the experiences which come to mortals in

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this world. It is impossible to find anywhere a thousand people among whom there are not at least a hundred who have lost money either through their own foolishness or through the rascality of others. When this loss comes to a man his temptation is to sit down and moan. He broods over his loss until the whole sky is shadowed. He cries out even in his sleep. He awakens in the morning to find all the sky drab. His loss unnerves him completely. He bewails his terrible misfortune, looking with eyes absolutely hopeless into a future that seems absolutely black. He may grieve himself into his grave.

Now it is a sad thing to lose money, but it is a still sadder thing for one to lose his good sense. What is the sense in grieving over a thing that has gone, and gone irretrievably? If the money has been lost, moaning over the loss of

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it will not bring it back. No man has ever made money by sighing. If a man could get his hand on the money simply by reaching into the past, that would be a sensible thing to do; but when the man knows that he cannot possibly get his hand on the money, and can grasp nothing but a shadow, and that shadow a shadow with poison in it, which will shrivel and blast his soul, how foolish it is for him to keep grasping at that shadow! Let him turn his back on the past and say to himself: "I will let it go. I will remember it no more forever. I will reach forward now to the things that lie before me."

Injuries ought also to be forgotten. We cannot get through life without being wounded. Sooner or later somebody hurts us. Some hurt us unintentionally, some hurt us maliciously and

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on purpose. Somebody lies about us because he is a liar, and somebody tries to tell the truth about us, but does not succeed. He misrepresents us because he cannot understand us. Somebody insults us, and again and again we are slighted. Somebody works against us, or tries to undermine us, or endeavors to tarnish our name or to weaken our influence. We are opposed by those who do not hesitate to do things which are tricky and mean. What shall we do with all these insults, these slights, these offences? Why not forget them? Why not cast them behind one's back and remember them no more forever? If a man broods over them and carries them along with him, he is using up his strength needlessly. A man is always in danger if he broods over a wrong that has been done him. A single resentment weighs more than a ton of

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lead. It is a millstone around a man's neck that will drown him in the depths of the sea.

Hate is the heaviest thing in God's universe, because it is most unlike the disposition of God. You cannot carry any of it along with you without using up your strength. How foolish, therefore, to carry even a little of it from one year into another! Why not throw it behind your back on the last day of the year? Why not wash the slate clean? You have got a great score of offences — well, wash the whole score out and begin all over again. A man is not master of himself, is not free to do his best work, unless he can stand on his feet and say, "There is not a soul upon the earth against whom I would lift my finger with a desire to hurt him, nor is there a single human being whom I have either the time or the disposition to hate."

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But what shall we say about our sins? Can these also be forgotten? Here we come to a very difficult question, for a sin is far different from a mistake or a blunder. We feel, and we feel rightly, that it has immeasurable significance, that it is an offence against the eternal God. How can we forget it, therefore, and how can God forget it? Certainly we cannot forget our sins. Thus have spoken many conscientious souls, and so they have remembered their sins, brooded over them, wept over them, brought them again and again and again to God, asking for His forgiveness. But this is wrong. We know it is wrong because of the results to which it leads. If a man broods over his sins he becomes morbid, and a morbid man is always weak. The morbidness may degenerate into remorse, and the remorse may pass on into insanity. Thousands of

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human beings have become insane because they were unwilling to forget their sins.

It is at this point that the Christian religion comes to help us. When left to ourselves we feel that we must carry our sins with us, there is no escape from them. But Christianity says, "Yes, you may cast even these behind your back, and remember them no more forever." That is what God does. He casts them behind His back. He buries them in the depths of the sea. He washes out the crimson until it is all white, even white as snow. That is the supreme message of the religion of Jesus Christ. Even sin is dissolved in the alchemy of the Infinite Love.

*"At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away,
It was there by faith I received my sight,
And now I am happy all the day."*

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Let the cross of Christ speak to you on the last day of the year. Let it tell you to remember your sins no more. We despise the message that has come to us through Jesus when we bring our old sins to God. Nothing but a new sin can be rightfully brought to Him. The old sins committed years ago look heinous in the light of advancing years, but we ought not to gather these up and bring them again and again to God. What would you men who are fathers think if your boy or girl should come to you day after day, saying, "Will you please forgive me for that wrong thing which I did," when you had already forgiven it long ago and had banished it from your mind? We do not believe what God has told us in Jesus Christ, His Son, when we bring back our old sins to Him. Let then the sins committed during this last year lie be-

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hind us. Let us say that we will remember them no more.

But there are good things also which we must learn how to forget. Victories must be forgotten; the successes must be cast behind our back. Many a man has been ruined simply because he remembered too well his triumphs. He goes into art and succeeds, or he goes into business and is prosperous, and he immediately begins to talk about his successes, about his prosperity. He remembers too well, and the result is he makes no progress. Goethe has somewhere said that whenever a man does a really fine thing the world conspires to keep him from doing it again. Yes, not only does the world conspire, but a man's own soul enters into the conspiracy. He is tempted to sit down with his success and muse over it and exult over it. In that hour

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of his exultation his soul begins to die. His ship, which proudly rode the waves, has its prow turned toward the open sea, but the old rope of retrospection ties it to the dock, and there it stands, day after day rising and falling with the tide, while other men, braver men with no overfondness for the past, sail out and on toward distant harbors, in which they find golden treasures which might have been won by the other man if he had not remembered too well that he had succeeded.

The life of many a man has been blasted because of early successes. How true this is in regard to families. It is known to every man familiar with American history that it is very seldom that a family amounts to anything for more than three generations. The first generation starts poor: there is nothing behind it and therefore there is no temp-

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tation to look backward, and the boys reach forward to the things that are ahead, and by reaching forward they succeed and make themselves a name and a fortune. The second generation, inheriting these treasures, increases them, expanding the bounds of the family influence, giving new lustre to the name. And then the third generation begins to look backward. It begins to talk about "our family, our name, our position, our influence,"—and that moment the family begins to decay.

The same thing is true of churches. Very rarely a church remains prosperous more than one generation. A church is one of the most human of all institutions. It seems well-nigh impossible to keep Christians from becoming vain-glorious and proud. Church prosperity has a subtle poison in it which seems to paralyze the heart. Men begin to

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talk about "our church" — what it did, how much money it gave, what great congregations it had. And the moment the members of a church begin to glory in the successes of the past it enters upon a stage of decline. The church of God has no business with the past. It may glance hastily backward now and then simply to confirm its faith in God, but let it grapple in season and out of season with the present, and reach boldly out toward the future.

Many persons have a tendency in the closing days of a year to fall into a pensive and melancholy mood. Glancing backward makes them sad. They think of the things they have done which they ought not to have done, they brood over the things they have not done which they ought to have done. This tendency to moody retrospection grows upon us as we advance in life. Youth is always

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looking forward. The past has little fascination for it; the great things are still to come. But by and by the day arrives on which a man feels that the larger part of life lies behind him. This is a great day in a man's life, and he is not likely to forget it. The habit of retrospection begins to grow upon him, and he dwells more and more upon the things which have been. Traveling down the western slope of the hill with the sun all red in the western sky, he dreams fond dreams of childhood and of the glowing years long gone. He thinks of the happy years of boyhood, and what it meant then to be alive. He thinks of what he was and what he did when, a young man full of fire and vigor, he started on his career. He remembers what he was in middle life, when his eye was undimmed and his natural force was unabated, when he could do a full

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man's work and still be fresh when evening came.

But this is not a wholesome mood into which to fall. We cannot bring youth back again, nor middle life after we once have passed it. The Garden of Eden, with its fragrance and its shade, lies at the beginning, and to it we cannot return. Our faces are in the other direction. We are moving toward the city of God. This then is the message for all people who have passed middle life, and especially for those who feel that the earthly journey is well-nigh completed. Your life is yet ahead of you. No matter how old you are, your life is yet to come; your real life, your full life, your rich life, — all this lies beyond you. No matter what successes you have won, your real success is yet to be achieved. No matter what joys you have tasted, the real raptures are still ahead of you.

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Why then need you grieve about your blunders? Let them rise like mountains behind your back. How can your blunders hurt you when your life is still ahead of you? Let your losses rise in dismal heaps; you will smile at the greatest of them a hundred years from now. The insults and the injuries, the wrongs which have been done you,—why not turn your back upon them? No man has ever hurt you; no man can ever hurt you. The only wounds which you bear in your soul are the wounds inflicted by yourself. All your enemies have failed, and your life is still ahead of you. Your sins—even these must be cast behind you. You have grieved that you were ever guilty of them, but now let your grief flow no more. God has said, “I will cast them behind my back, and remember them no more.” Believe Him! He is good enough to do just that.

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Take Him at His word and remember this,—that no matter what your sins have been, your life is still ahead of you.

It is beautiful to think that the year now passing is indeed the year of our Lord. It is numbered from His birth, and it is entrusted with a message from His heart. If we could hear it speaking we could hear it saying, “Forget the things that lie behind, and reach forward to the things that are before, for you shall see greater things than any which your eyes have yet beheld.” We have seen wonderful things this last year, but we shall see greater things in the year that is coming. We shall have a wider apprehension of the divine mercy and a fuller realization of the divine power. The best things are always yet to come. At the river Jordan, when the apostles stood spellbound

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by certain manifestations which awed them, Christ said to them, "You shall see greater things than these." All the way along His career they marveled at Him, saying, "We have never seen it after this fashion;" and His reply was, "You shall see greater things than these."

Let us hear the old year saying to us the very words which Jesus spoke, and speaks: "You shall see greater things than these." This is true for all of us, but for none of us is it so sublimely, gloriously true as for those of us for whom this coming year shall be our last. When this corruption shall have put on incorruption and this mortality shall have put on immortality, then and not till then shall we grasp the full and thrilling significance of Jesus' words, "You shall see greater things than these."

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“Stretching forward to the things which are before.”

PHIL. III. 13.

IN order to enter into the power of this language we must catch the picture which is before St. Paul's eye. Like all other minds of the first order, Paul moves easily and naturally through the realm of images and analogies. He is as full of figures as a poet is. In this respect Jesus and Paul were alike. Jesus is always picturesque. He cannot speak without painting a picture. But Jesus and Paul, in their use of illustrations, were unlike in one point: Jesus drew His pictures largely from nature. In the open-air life of Palestine He and the people were constantly in contact with the natural world, and the sights and the sounds of the fields passed easily into His discourses. He weaves into His paragraphs the blossoms of the spring

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and the scent of the grass, and as we follow Him along the bypaths of His thought we can feel the wind blowing on our cheeks and now and then can catch glimpses of the sea. But St. Paul apparently cares little for nature; it makes slight impression upon him. He is interested in the world of human thought and human passion and human activity. It is the world of man from which he brings the images by means of which he will express the great ideas which God has anointed him to teach.

One of the most conspicuous features of the world in which Paul lived was athleticism. We know something about it even in our day, for it has become a striking phenomenon of our time, and a school does not count itself complete without a gymnasium, and a university is of all universities most wretched unless it has a stadium. There are thou-

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sands of men who are interested in no other literature than in the literature of athletic contests, and to not a few athleticism has assumed the dignity and the importance of a religion. But in all this we cannot reach the pitch of enthusiasm which prevailed in the Grecian world of the first century. Wherever the Greeks had gone they had carried with them their abounding interest in the discipline of the body and in the development of physical prowess.

The supreme spectacle on this earth to the pious Jew was the sacrifices in the temple, and the supreme spectacle to the Roman was the return of a victorious general, bringing back with him the trophies of the latest war; but the supreme spectacle to a Greek was the Isthmian games, and of all the Isthmian games which thrilled the Grecian blood

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the foot-race was the most important. The man who won this race made for himself a name which extended through the Grecian world. These contests brought together people from all directions. The most distinguished citizens presided as judges, there were throngs of applauding spectators, some illustrious poet wrote a poem in honor of the victor, and the memory of his triumph was handed down from generation to generation as a rich legacy. Everybody, therefore, to whom Paul preached was familiar with the Isthmian games. The stadium and the gymnasium were stamped indelibly upon the eye. Everybody understood the discipline and the sacrifices and the tremendous exertion of a racer, and Paul, looking on it all, said: "That is my idea of a Christian; that is precisely what a Christian ought to be and do. He ought to discipline

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himself; he ought to concentrate his energies; he ought to keep his eye upon the goal, remembering that the prize is not a fading garland, but a crown of righteousness laid up by God for all who love Him."

What new life is poured into this sentence when it is read in the glow of an athlete's face, and when we can hear running through its music the labored panting of the athlete's breath! "Forgetting the things which are behind,"—what new significance that possesses when we think of what a runner does! He kicks out the earth from under him as he goes, caring nothing for the distance already passed. His eye is on the distance yet to cover. What does he care for the spectators whom he has left behind him? One of them may have smiled superciliously at him, another may have jeered at him, here and

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there may have been a hiss. But for all these things he cares nothing, for his eye is on the goal. "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,"—that is the way the old version put it, but the English word "reaching" does not do justice to the Greek. Our revisers have substituted a stronger word: it is "stretching." What is stretching but reaching raised to a higher power? Stretching is reaching with all the muscles tensed. It is a long Greek word which St. Paul uses. He uses it nowhere else in any of his letters. It contains fourteen letters. He takes two Greek prepositions and welds them together in order to express what his mind sees and his heart feels. It is a stretch that he has in mind,—a stretch forward and a stretch after: it is a purposeful stretching. The man is reach-

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ing forward with his eye upon a prize, and the eye draws the whole body after it. "That," he says, "is my idea of a Christian. It is in that spirit that I am running, and, brethren, I ask you to follow my example."

This is a good picture to hang up along with your calendar, to be looked at every day through the year. What a contrast between that picture and the picture of the ordinary Christian as we know him nowadays! How lethargic the average Christian is! What inertia there is in him! How free from enthusiasm! How he loiters! How he dawdles! How he goes back and measures the distance already covered! How he turns to the right and to the left, paying attention now to his friends and now to his foes! The average Christian is not running: that constitutes the tragedy of modern Christendom. We have mil-

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lions of professing Christians, but alas! how few of them are running the race. Let us hang the picture up then along with the calendar for the New Year, and when the old lassitude begins to steal over us and we fall into a desultory and loitering mood, let us look up at the picture of the athlete running, and through him God will speak unto our souls.

Man was made to reach. He is a reaching animal. No other creature on the earth reaches as does he. The little child shows the genius of our human nature almost from the very start. Hold the baby tight or he will wriggle himself out of your arms upon the floor. A little child is always reaching, striving to get hold of the things that lie beyond him. His favorite direction is upward. He will take hold of anything which he can get his little hands upon and

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pull it down if he can. As soon as he begins to speak his language also reaches. His first sentences are questions; and what are questions but reachings of the mind? Before he was able to speak he had manifested his nature in the movements of his arms, and as soon as the mind develops, the mind reaches also for the things that are before. As soon as he understands one thing, it has no further interest for him; he goes on and takes up another. A child adopts St. Paul's principle: "Forgetting the things that are behind, I stretch forward to the things that are before." There is eternal significance in the fact that Jesus did not put a man in the midst of his disciples, saying, "This is what you ought to be." He set in the midst a child, saying, "Unless you become as a little child, you cannot enter the kingdom."

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And if it was a little child upon whose head Jesus pronounced the blessing, it was upon the head of the Pharisees that he poured his fiercest condemnation. What was the matter with the Pharisee that Jesus opposed him so? What was wrong with this man that the Master was always condemning him? He was not a murderer, he was not a thief, he was not a libertine, he was not a non-churchgoer. The most respectable people in all Palestine were Pharisees, and yet Jesus was always launching his thunderbolts against the Pharisees. What was the matter with the Pharisee? He was the one man in Palestine who had ceased to reach. He had attained his height and wanted to grow no taller; he had reached the goal and wanted to advance no further. That was the Pharisee, and that was the man for whom Jesus had

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no hope. Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a Publican; and the Pharisee folded his arms in great self-complacency and ran over the list of his achievements. There you have the portrait of the Pharisee in the first century and in the twentieth. He is the man who is satisfied: he prides himself upon his attainments; he thanks God that he has gotten further than his neighbors. But over in the corner there is a poor wretch who simply reaches up his soul to heaven, saying: "Be merciful! be merciful! be merciful to me!" And the Son of God says that that man in the corner, who is reaching, is the man who is pleasing unto God.

This is a good thing to remember in the first days of a new year, for the past is likely to leave us in one of two conditions,—in the mood of despondency

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or in the mood of complacency. We are depressed by the past's failures and sorrows, or we are elated by the things which we have done, proud of the progress we have made. We always make too much of the past when we allow it to render us self-complacent. Forgetting the things that are behind, let us reach. If we should go up and down the world to-day and pick out the most promising people, the people whom we should say ought to stand in the first place, we should pick out the men of attainments; men who have built up a large number of virtues and graces, men who have achieved large and noble things. These men, we would say, are the men with whom God is best pleased and of whom largest things may be expected. But the Son of God, if He should move up and down our world, would not pick out the men of

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attainment, but the men of aspiration.

For the man who aspires there is more hope than there is for him who has attained. It is not what we have already achieved, but what we want to achieve, that fixes our place in the estimation of the Eternal. It is not what we have accomplished, but what we desire, that gives us our rank in the scale of being. The supreme question, therefore, at the beginning of the year is not, "What have you attained?" but, "How far are you reaching?" The future belongs to the man who aspires. There is hope for every one who is reaching. "Unless above himself he can erect himself, how poor a thing is man." And the only man in the world who is pitiably and hopelessly poor is the man who has no desire to reach forward to the things which are in front of him.

If a man does not reach, retribution

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begins at once its awful work. The doctrine of evolution has a great deal to suggest to us at this point. The latest science assures us that capacity is never developed except under pressure; only those parts of our being unfold which are subject to a great strain. This has been true from the beginning, and only those forms of life have succeeded in climbing the long and difficult ascent which have been able to sustain the strain and the pressure. Whatsoever parts of our nature are not subject to this strain gradually fail. Why is it we cannot see so far as a man who lived in the stone age? We have advanced in a thousand things, but not in the power of seeing. It is because we have not stretched our eyes as the man in the woods does. Why do we not hear so keenly as the savage? It is because we do not stretch our sense of

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hearing. How does it happen that we have not the sense of direction in any such measure as it is possessed by the wild man in the forest? It is because it is not used. It is only the faculty that is stretched which is built up and strengthened; the faculty with which we do not reach is the faculty that disintegrates and finally disappears.

Charles Darwin, one of the greatest scientists of the last century, grieved in his later years that he had lost his appreciation for poetry and music and art. As a young man he had enjoyed all of these, but for years he stretched his mind in other directions, and at the close of his career he had lost his appreciation for the high things of the spirit. If history makes anything clear, it makes it clear that the prizes have always come to the men and the nations which have reached. There was

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a time in history when little Holland led the world in manufactures, in art, and in commerce. How could this little nation achieve such an immortal renown? How did it become strong enough to defy Philip II of Spain, and take its place at the head of the procession of the nations of the world? It did it all by reaching. No other man in Europe reached as did the Dutchman. He stretched forward over the western edge of Europe and picked up the bottom of the sea, and on that built his home, and having done that he was ready to lead the world.

Still another illustration is the New Englander. Through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were many colonies established all along the eastern coast of North and South America, — and most of them came to nothing. Those that most rapidly disintegrated

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were those in South America and on the coast of Florida and of Central America and of Mexico, where the conditions were most favorable and where the food dropped from the trees into the mouths of men. Most of these colonies languished and shriveled and finally died, whereas the colonies planted along the shores of New England, where the soil was rocky and the skies were gray, grew and flourished and gave lustre to the New World. And why did the blessing come to the New Englander? Simply because he reached. He was always reaching. By his incessant reaching he put iron into his blood and fire into his heart, and built up for himself a character which has been one of the dominating factors in the development of America. Although God has spread a layer of Irishmen over New England, and over the Irishmen a layer of French

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Canadians, and over the French Canadians a layer of Italians and Poles, nevertheless New England it is to-day, and New England it will forever be, because the New Englander of the seventeenth century by stretching built up a character and a temper able to lift uncounted generations to its noble standards and high ideals.

The man who reaches is the one man who has hope of salvation. The man who does not reach is the man who is doomed. What do you think is the most dangerous period in human life? The wise men have never yet been able to agree. There are those who have contended that the crucial period is that which elapses between thirteen and seventeen, and that if a human being can pass through that period with body sound and mind sane and spirit unpolluted, the future is secure. Others have contended that the

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danger period is in the early twenties, when the blood is hottest and the world and the flesh are the most dazzling and fascinating. Others have said that it is in the later forties, when a man has reached the top of the hill and knows it, and realizes that henceforth he must look into the west. Others have said that it is in the early sixties, — when Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “It is time to be old, to take in sail.” There are others who claim that a man does not reach the danger zone until he has passed three-score and ten.

The fact remains that all periods of our earthly life are dangerous. There are perils all the way. A man is never safe, no matter how old he is. That was a stroke of genius in John Bunyan which led him to paint a path leading down to hell starting near the gate of heaven. There are two periods which

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may be regarded as especially dangerous. The first is the period immediately succeeding a man's coming out of college. Through the college year a man is obliged to reach. He lives in a world of books, and great ideals are always before his eyes. Unless he is absolutely incorrigible and a fool, he reaches forward to the things that lie before. But on leaving college he drops his books, he is not subject to the same pressure, the ideals are not held so closely before his eyes. It is in this period that he is likely to relax his efforts after the higher life and to fall into the current of the world. Phillips Brooks always contended that the most critical years in a man's life were the five years after leaving college, and one of the most distinguished physicians of our generation in his latest book has called attention in solemn words to the perils of this same period. One rea-

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son why our American cities are in the deplorable condition in which they find themselves is because thousands of our college graduates go to pieces in these five critical and crucial years.

The other period which is found to be preëminently dangerous is the period which follows the attainment of a man's ambition. A man starts out to do a certain thing in this world, and he does it. He makes his fortune, he achieves his success, he does his work,—and then what a temptation it is to say, “Now I will take things easy; I will make myself comfortable!” In that moment a soul begins to enter upon the road that leads down to death. How often it has been noted that men who give up their business go rapidly to pieces physically. We have come almost to be afraid of having a man retire from business, feeling that after that

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he cannot live long. What is the explanation for this? It is the paradox of life that pressure enables a man to stand a strain, keeps him alive. Take off the pressure and reduce the strain and you hasten a man's death. Therefore a man ought never to retire from business unless he intends to go into some other business. There are different kinds of business, and all of them require a deal of reaching.

Let us hope the time will come when a larger number of our American business men will retire at the age of sixty, or even earlier, in order to devote the remaining years of their life to those large social and religious questions which have received in the last fifty years but scant attention. Our men have poured their best blood and their finest energy into the development of the banking system and the commer-

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cial system and the industrial system, and have left almost untouched those great problems of social and moral reconstruction which must be grappled with by the men of the coming generation.

It is perfectly safe for a man to retire from the business of making money if he will go into this higher business of setting the world straight. Instead of taking things easy and doing as we please as we get older, we ought to take the law of Christ with new enthusiasm to our heart and crucify the flesh. That law is not intended only for young men of twenty: it is for men over sixty and over seventy. Crucify the flesh, sacrifice yourself, do the thing that you do not want to do, do not surrender to your moods, but fight them,—only thus is it that you can keep alive. And here again we can get a lesson from the race-track. The

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runner does not do his best work at the first of the course: he saves himself a little, he is careful not to overdo. He will get in his best work in the last hundred yards. That is the way in which we ought to live. The last years of our life ought to be the best, the fullest of self-sacrifice, the richest in obedience to God. There is something thrilling in the fact that Saul of Tarsus used the figure of the runner as the last figure which he ever used. When a prisoner in the city of Rome, with the flash of the headsmen's sword in his eyes, he wrote these words to his dearest friend: "I have finished the course."

What is it now that Paul is running after? He is reaching forward after something. What is the prize? He has already told us. He wants to be the man that God had in mind when Paul was created. He feels that Christ has

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laid His hand on him, and he wants to be the man that Christ had in mind. That was the supreme ambition of his life, that was the prize for which he was running with all his might. What a thrilling ambition! If that does not bring out the energies of the soul, what will? Think how men run for lesser prizes. They are running furiously all around us. The world is crowded with runners racing for the prize. They are running after money, after fame, after position,—and no sacrifice is too great to make, no self-discipline is too severe. Men will do anything, subject themselves to any strain, in order to win the prize. Alas! how often they sacrifice the best things in this world in order to reach the goal.

And what are these prizes? Garlands of pine, perishable garlands, all of them. What is wealth? A fading garland.

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What is position? A garland that is fresh but for a day. What is fame? A garland that soon wilts. And yet men run with every nerve tensed and every sinew stretched in order that they may win them. Oh, runners, stop and listen! The garland that you are after is a fading one. Why don't you run for the garland that is immortal?

But even in this running for fading garlands there is something that stirs the blood. It is magnificent, even if it is tragic. Better expend one's energy in running for a goal, no matter what it is, than to idle away one's life on a bench in the sun. But if men will run so after fading garlands, how ought we to run who have been laid hold of by Christ? He has seized us; His hand has been upon us. He has a purpose. There is a divine plan. We were laid hold of to carry out the plan. He laid His hand

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upon us in our parents, in our grandfather and grandmother, in the Christian men and women who lived their lives before we were born. To be the man that He expected us to be and do the work which He planned—that is the goal toward which we ought to run with every nerve alive.

That is a lovely little poem of the poet Longfellow, entitled *Excelsior*. A young man starts out at the foot of the Alps to make his upward way, bearing a banner on which is inscribed the single word, “Excelsior.” Here and there voices beg him to tarry awhile. The temptations become more and more seductive as he reaches the upper slopes, but turning a deaf ear to all, the youth goes bravely upward bearing his banner “Excelsior.” That is the spirit in which every soul ought to live. We are going up the mountain, and the

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word that ought to burn in the heart is
"Excelsior." Higher still, and higher!
Higher always, and still higher! until
at last the words are frozen on our lips
in the driving storm of the last day,
and we pass into the world where the
King is, and where our blessedness will
be unending because we shall grow for-
ever and ever. Ours should be the spirit
of Columbus:

*Behind him lay the gray Azores,
Behind the Gates of Hercules;
Before him not the ghost of shores,
Before him only shoreless seas.
The good mate said: "Now must we pray,
For lo! the very stars are gone.
Brave Admiral, speak; what shall I say?"
"Why, say, 'Sail on! sail on! and on!'"*

*"My men grow mutinous day by day;
My men grow ghastly wan and weak."
The stout mate thought of home; a spray
Of salt wave washed his swarthy cheek.*

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*“What shall I say, brave Admiral, say,
If we sight naught but seas at dawn?”*
*“Why, you shall say at break of day,
‘Sail on! sail on! sail on! and on!’”*

*They sailed and sailed, as winds might blow,
Until at last the blanched mate said:
“Why, now not even God would know
Should I and all my men fall dead.
These very winds forget their way,
For God from these dread seas is gone.
Now speak, brave Admiral, speak and say”—
He said: “Sail on! sail on! and on!”*

*They sailed; they sailed. Then spake the mate:
“This mad sea shows his teeth to-night.
He curls his lip, he lies in wait,
With lifted teeth, as if to bite!
Brave Admiral, say but one good word:
What shall we do when hope is gone?”
The words leapt like a leaping sword:
“Sail on! sail on! sail on! and on!”*

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